

How a Case Enters the Child Welfare System

STAGE 1: Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect

- Someone in the community calls the Arkansas child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964 to report that they suspect a child is being abused or neglected. This call may be anonymous.
- Local law enforcement may also be called if the child is in immediate danger.

STAGE 2: Screening Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect

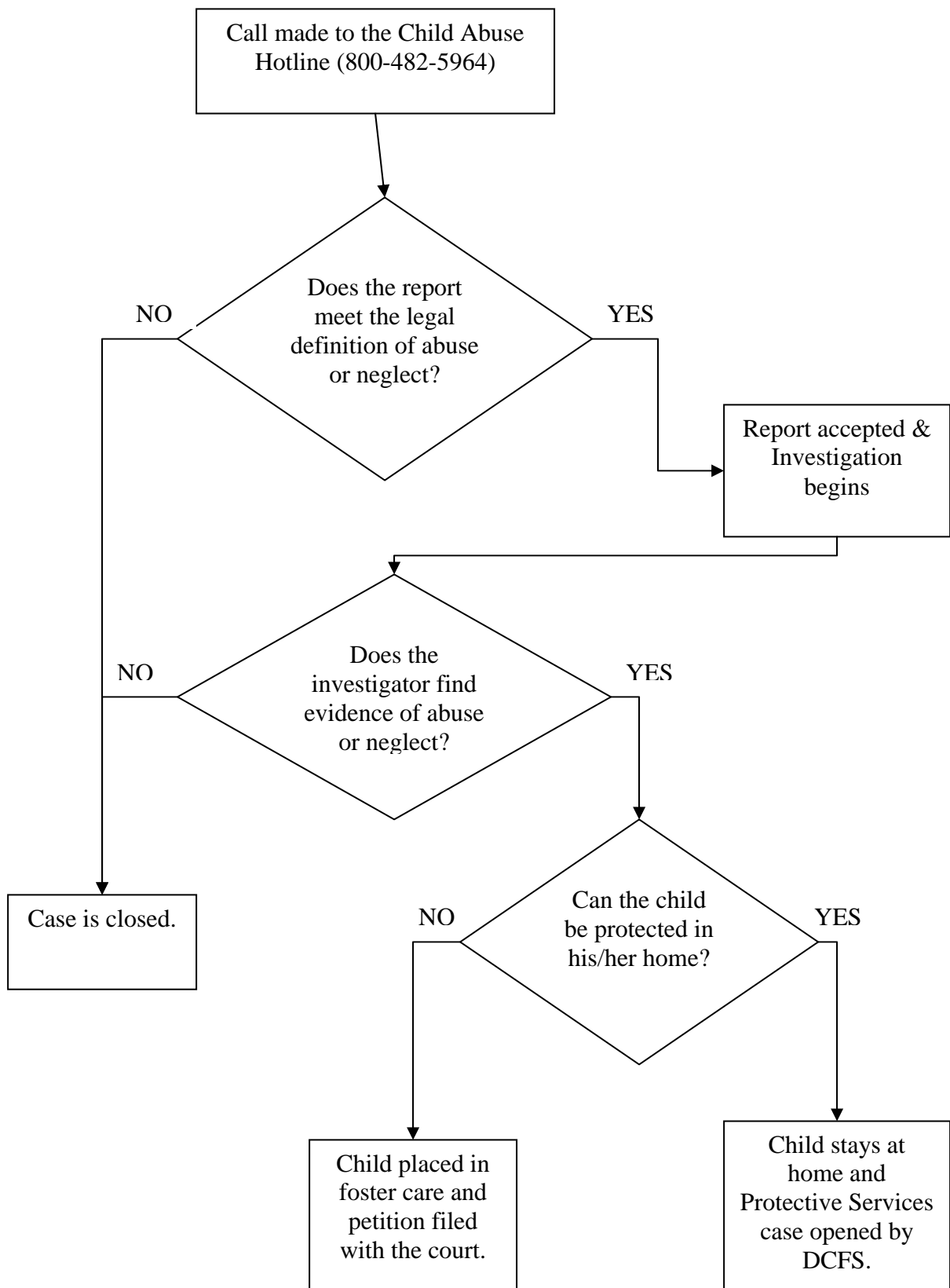
- If the abuse or neglect reported meets the legal definition, the report is accepted by the hotline and an investigator is assigned.
- The reporter will be told whether or not the report is accepted.
- If a report is not accepted, a supervisor will review it and can decide to accept it.
- If a report is not accepted and the reporter learns more information, he/she can call back in and re-report.

STAGE 3: Investigating Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect

- An investigator from the Arkansas State Police, the Division of Children & Family Services, or local law enforcement looks into the report. He or she will talk to the child, the person who made the report, and the family. The investigator will try to determine:
 - Whether the child has been abused or neglected, how, and by whom and
 - Whether there are safety concerns.
- If the investigator finds evidence that abuse or neglect occurred, the report is substantiated, or founded.
- If there is not sufficient evidence of abuse or neglect, the report is unsubstantiated (unsubbed). The case is then closed. Supportive Services can be offered to the family.
- A mandated reporter can find out by mail if the report was substantiated or not if the reporter leaves his/her name and a mailing address.

STAGE 4: Intervening in Cases of Abuse or Neglect

- If the investigation finds abuse or neglect, DCFS then determines whether the child can remain safely in his/her home. DCFS can do the following:
 - Leave the child at home and provide protective services to the family.
 - Leave the child at home but file a 20-day petition with the court alleging abuse or neglect.
 - Bring the child into foster care for protection. If the child is brought into foster care, a petition is filed with the court within 72 hours and a hearing is held within 5 business days.



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To better understand how a case of child maltreatment enters the child welfare system, read the four scenarios and answer the questions below.

Scenario 1

Mrs. Delma Barnes lives next door to Sharon Frazier and her daughter Taysia, who is seven. Mrs. Barnes called the child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964 to report that she observed Taysia being spanked with a hand by her mom. When asked, Mrs. Barnes told the caseworker that it wasn't an "extra hard spanking," but that she just did not believe in spanking children at all. Mrs. Barnes said she saw Taysia afterward, and there were no bruises or marks from the spanking. Mrs. Barnes talked with Taysia, who told her she doesn't like being spanked. The case was screened out by the hotline operator, so there was no investigation.

Scenario 2

Mr. Jackson Jones lives across the street from a family with four children under the age of six. He called the child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964 to report that the parents are sitting on the porch smoking pot and that there are people in and out of their house at all hours. He had never seen the children unsupervised or with any marks or bruises. The case was screened out by the hotline operator, so there was no investigation.

Scenario 3

Joey, age two, attends daycare, where a staff member noticed that he came to school with a black eye. She asked Joey about it, and he said his brother told him not to talk about it. The daycare worker, being concerned, called the child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964. After talking with the child, his brother, and his parents, as well as several neighbors, the investigator found that the black eye occurred when Joey walked behind his brother, who was at-bat in a neighborhood softball game and was hit by the bat. All accounts of the situation were the same and were found believable. There was no evidence to support that Joey was abused or neglected; therefore, the case was not substantiated and was closed.

Scenario 4

First-grade teacher Susan Williams called the child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964 to report a concern about two of her students, Dot and Stan Grant, six-year-old twins. They live with their mother, Arlene, and her boyfriend, Tom. Ms. Williams is concerned that the twins are in the middle of fights between Arlene and Tom. There were bruises on Dot's face, which she said happened when Tom accidentally hit her when he was trying to hit her mom.

A caseworker talked with the children separately at school and both children said that Tom hit Dot, "on accident." Both Dot and Stan said they were afraid of Tom because he hits their mom.

When interviewed by the caseworker, Arlene told the caseworker that sometimes they fight, "but who doesn't?" She said that Tom doesn't hurt her and has never hit her. She

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was surprised that the caseworker could have gotten information that was so wrong. She didn't want the caseworker to talk with Tom. When the caseworker explained that interviewing Tom was necessary, Arlene had a nervous expression on her face.

Tom was mad when the caseworker arrived to talk with him. He said he was good to Arlene's children and buys them what they need. Even though he and Arlene do fight sometimes, he said he would never hit her.

Further interviews were conducted with the teacher, the maternal grandmother, a neighbor, and a friend of the mother. All but the friend were concerned about these children and told the caseworker that the twins are often in the middle of fights.

Due to the children's disclosures, observations from interviews with their mom and her boyfriend, and information from the collateral contacts, neglect was substantiated based on failure to protect. The case will go to DCFS for protective services. The children were not taken into foster care and the case was not taken to court.

Scenario 5

Dr. Valerie Alajuwon called the child abuse hotline at 1-800-482-5964 and stated she had examined and admitted Alexa James, age fifteen months, who was brought in by her mother, Sheila Washington, and her live-in boyfriend, Lewis Murphy. Alexa could not stand on her right leg. X-ray results showed a fracture of her right tibia (lower leg) and a one- to two-week-old fracture of her right femur (upper leg).

When interviewed by the investigator, neither Ms. Washington nor Mr. Murphy could explain Alexa's injuries. They claimed to be the child's only caretakers. The investigator requested that Dr. Alajuwon do a complete physical examination of Alexa, including a series of x-rays. The x-rays revealed a healing rib fracture in addition to the two leg fractures. Since the three fractures were in various stages of healing, Dr. Alajuwon diagnosed Alexa as a victim of battered child syndrome.

At the time of Alexa's discharge from the hospital, there was no new information as to the cause of her injuries. The various ages, type, severity, and location of the injuries without explanations about their occurrence indicated the injuries were nonaccidental. Therefore, to ensure the child's care, supervision, and protection, a petition was filed with the court and Alexa was placed in foster care. A Probable Cause hearing was scheduled for later that week.

Questions (answers below):

1. In which scenarios were the reports screened out before the investigation stage? Why?

(choose from scenarios 1, 2, 3, 4)

2. In which scenario was the case closed after investigation? Why?
3. In which scenario was abuse or neglect founded and the children left in the home? Why?
4. In which scenario was a petition filed with the court? Why?

Answers:

1. *In scenario 1 (the case of Taysia being spanked), the report was screened out. Spanking is not considered abuse in Arkansas unless it causes more than transient pain and leaves more than temporary marks.*

In scenario 2 (the parents smoking pot), the report was also screened out. While smoking pot is illegal, there was no sign that the children were harmed. If a neighbor sees illegal activity, calling 911 is the proper action.

2. *In scenario 3 (the case of Joey with the black eye), the report was accepted but the case was closed after investigation. The investigator found that the mark was a result of an accident.*
3. *In scenario 4 (Dot and Stan), the report was accepted and the case founded. The investigator found that neglect has occurred based on failure to protect the children from harm. DCFS did not believe the children were in danger currently, however, and so left the children at home and worked with Arlene on a protective services case.*
4. *In scenario 5 (the case of Alexis with broken bones), the report was accepted, the investigation was substantiated, and a petition was filed with the court. Alexis was taken into foster care as she could not be safely left in her home.*

Responses if the person clicks on the wrong answer:

1. *If choose scenario 3, say, "Try again. In scenario 3, the call was accepted, but the investigator found that it was an accidental injury."*

If choose scenario 4, say, "Try again. In scenario 4, the report was accepted and the case founded."

If choose scenario 5, say, “Try again. In scenario 5, the report was accepted and the case founded.”

2. *If choose scenario 1, say, “Try again. In scenario 1, the call was not accepted by the hotline.”*

If choose scenario 2, say, “Try again. In scenario 2, the call was not accepted by the hotline.”

If choose scenario 4, say, “Try again. In scenario 4, the case was founded and opened for services after the investigation.”

If choose scenario 5, say, “Try again. In scenario 5, the case was founded and opened for services after the investigation.”

3. *If choose scenario 1, say, “Try again. In scenario 1, the call was not accepted by the hotline.”*

If choose scenario 2, say, “Try again. In scenario 2, the call was not accepted by the hotline.”

If choose scenario 3, say, “Try again. In scenario 3, the call was accepted, but the investigator found that it was an accidental injury and closed the case.”

If choose scenario 5, say, “Try again. In scenario 5, the case was opened but the child was placed in foster care to ensure her safety.”

4. *If choose scenario 1 or 2, say, “Try again. In this scenario, the call was not accepted by the hotline.”*

If choose scenario 3, say, “Try again. In scenario 3, the call was accepted, but the investigator found that it was an accidental injury and closed the case.”

If choose scenario 4, say, “Try again. In scenario 4, a protective services case was opened, but the children remained in their home.”